Opportunity For Renewal

Report On The Lac La Biche School Division #51

Alberta

OPPORTUNITY FOR RENEWAL

The Executive Summary

of The Report

on The Study of Lac La Biche School Division #51

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this investigation, which was commissioned by the Minister of Education at the request of the Board of Trustees of the Lac La Biche School Division was to assist the Board resolve any issues it is confronting with respect to the June 1984 and the September 1984 fighting incidents at J. A. Williams High School. Assistance was to be provided by means of a thorough investigation and recommendations for courses of action to help resolve any issues identified.

Although the study was sparked by the incidents of fighting in J. A. Williams High School, the emphasis of the study was on a system review.

For Lac La Biche the circumstances in which it finds itself are influenced by the recession and the general retrenchment of resource availability, by the changing expectations of government and the public regarding accountability, partnerships, the decision making process, flexibility, and by decreasing enrollments, and by a number of trends which may be found in education throughout the province and Canada. The foregoing are common to many jurisdictions.

The problems faced by Lac La Biche have been magnified because of the incidents at J. A. Williams High School in June and September, 1984, the wide press coverage they received, and the presence of underlying concerns and frustrations in some schools and the system. These problems created a climate which made an external investigation necessary.

The Board is to be commended for recognizing the need of responding in a constructive way to solve the problems faced by the jurisdiction.

Dr. E. J. Ingram of the Department of Educational Administration, University of Alberta was contracted by Alberta Education to undertake the study and to be the Principal Investigator. Research and writing assistance were provided by Mr. L. Edwards, Mr. F. Flanagan, Mr. D. Wall and Ms. I. Yuzdepski from Alberta Education.

CONDUCTING THE STUDY

The investigation concentrated on the underlying conditions and concerns of which the incidents at the high school were considered to be symptomatic. It was felt that this focus would deal with the more important issues by recommending orientations to action and courses of action which

would be beneficial to the whole system and not merely deal with one or two isolated incidents.

Data for the study were collected by means of document and literature reviews, interviews, questionnaire surveys and observations by the study team. The data were analysed, described and interpreted and then used to identify the issues confronting the Division and to generate approaches to issue resolution.

THE FINDINGS

The findings of the study are reported in four sections - the catalyst (fighting incidents), a description of the relevant aspects of the Lac La Biche School Division, the survey findings and the literature review.

The Catalyst in Perspective. "A quarrel in June 1984, and September 1984, incidents involving two groups of boys and girls at J. A. Williams High School captured the attention of the media." The causes were attributed to a number of circumstances including inadequate supervision, and overcrowded conditions. The media was faulted by the public-at-large in Lac La Biche for sensationalizing the incidents and for inaccurate reporting.

The Lac La Biche School Division. The School Division is made up of four subdivisions each of which is represented by one trustee except for that which includes the town of Lac La Biche - it has two trustees. The Division operates seven schools with 126 teachers and approximately 2000 students, and a classroom at the Youth Assessment Centre under contract to Social Services. The schools include: Caslan, Central Elementary, Dr. Swift, J. A. Williams, Plamondon, Vera M. Welsh and Wandering River.

The Division serves students of many different ethnic backgrounds including Lebanese, Russian, French and Native.

Of significant note are two Metis Settlements within the boundaries of the Division. Caslan Metis Settlement (Kikino West) has a population of 655 and has students at schools in the Hamlet of Caslan and in Lac La Biche. The other settlement is Kikino (Kikino East) with a population of 671. Kikino children beyond ECS attend schools in Lac La Biche.

Perceptions and Concerns. The perceptions and concerns of the stakeholders in the Division were collected through personal interviews, interest group meetings and questionnaires.

An analysis and interpretation of the data collected suggest that:

1) The most consistent concern is with how the Division is operated and about how some schools are operated.

2) Also a consistent concern in regard to the program is that career and personal counselling is needed. The feelings are mixed about other aspects of the program. However, there is a general concern that programs more relevant to the wants and needs of students and parents are needed.

3) The communication between teachers and the Board and between the parents and the Board is of considerable concern and needs improvement.

4) Opinion varies about climate in individual schools. On the system level, climate is generally viewed as poor, especially since the teachers' strike.

5) There is general dissatisfaction with the school facilities. Most schools are perceived as being in run down condition and in need of upgrading.

6) There is a consistent concern with the routing of buses and with the time and distance students have to travel.

7) There is concern that bused students do not have extra-curricular activity opportunities.

8) There is concern that teachers - in parent teacher interviews -and Board members do not sincerely listen to the comments made by parents.

There is greater dissatisfaction among (High School) parents from J. A. Williams on the operation of the school and climate at the school when compared to (High School) parents from Plamondon. Also, there is greater dissatisfaction among High School students at J. A. Williams High School regarding facilities when compared to High School students at Plamondon.

And finally, it is of note that the levels of satisfaction expressed by respondents to the Lac La Biche Questionnaires are considerably lower than the levels of satisfaction to the same or similar questions asked in the Small Catholic Schools study recently undertaken in Alberta by the

principal investigator for this investigation, and in a similar study in Mountain View County.

The Literature Review. A review of the literature was conducted to provide information to complement the perceptions and concerns, to provide a basis for a discussion of issues and for the changes required within the jurisdiction. The topics covered are: continuous progress programming (CPP), community/parental involvement, leadership, multicultural education, school climate, and communication.

A central concept is communication. It is discussed as relating not only to the access to information about the system but also to verbal and non-verbal interaction. The need for the provision of mechanisms for increased co-operation and communication between all stakeholders is discussed. The need for sincere listening on the part of school system staff and the belief that old problems and concerns can be resolved with a fresh approach are also mentioned.

The literature review is intended to provide a starting point for approaches to the topics mentioned. The bibliography suggests possibilities for further reading.

Following the presentation of this information base the report continues by interpreting the findings first by discussing conditions and issues relevant to the Division and then by providing alternatives and recommendations for action within and without the Division to resolve the basic issues.

THE ISSUES

The identification of issues and conditions, that impact on the situation is a major function of any system review. The term issues is defined as those underlying concerns and conditions of which the "incidents" at J. A. Williams High School may have been symptomatic.

The analysis and interpretation of the data collected revealed several conditions which impact on the development, delivery, governance, administration and financing of education in the Lac La Biche School Division. Solutions and change are viewed as being possible in either the short term (within one to four years) or long term (five to ten years).

The study found that there are significant issues confronting the school system which are of concern to all stakeholders. The areas in which these issues arise are system governance (the operation of the Board), system administration, administration at the school level, program development

and program delivery. In each of these areas the system as a whole tends to operate in a conventional manner which appears unresponsive to changes desired by the various stakeholders in the jurisdiction.

Several key issues were identified. These include:

1) how to increase parents', teachers', students' and the community's confidence in the Board, system administration and school administration;

2) how to effectively and efficiently change the System's governance and administrative orientations and practices so as to better meet the needs of the times;

3) how to modify program development and delivery within the System so as to better meet the needs of the students and the community;

4) how to raise the level of morale among teachers; and,

5) how to improve the feelings of frustration and the poor climate reported by a significant number of students, parents and teachers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations were developed given the interpretative discussion of the issues.

Few of the issues and concerns identified could be said to have led directly to the incidents of fighting at J. A. Williams. However, they have contributed to conditions conducive to such incidents. Accordingly, the focus of the recommendations is on the underlying conditions of the system. A set of recommendations has been developed for J. A. Williams High School, and the Board of Trustees, however.

Over the past few years there has been increasing restiveness in education and this intensification has resulted in an orientation to self-examination and renewal. As a result there is:

1) increased emphasis on tightening expectations and standards for educational governance, administration, teaching and learning;

2) greater accountability for those responsible for the system to their clientele and to the provincial government;

3) greater concern for efficiency and effectiveness;

4) greater emphasis on local flexibility for program development and delivery initiatives (although this emphasis is in apparent conflict with moves toward provincial standardization);

5) greater concern for the relevance of programming and for the needs and aspirations of minority groups;

6) increased involvement of students, parents and the community in educational decision making; and

7) sharper focus on the relationship of the school to the community it serves.

In making the recommendations the study team took into account the above trends in education in Alberta, relevant literature, the opinions and concerns of the stakeholders in Lac La Biche as well as the constraining conditions and issues. It is interesting to note that there is a great deal of congruence among the trends on a provincial level, the literature in the field and the views of a significant number of respondents in the Lac La Biche investigation.

There are no easy solutions to the issues facing the jurisdiction. Some might suggest that the quickest solution is the addition of certain courses, the addition of more bus routes, the building of smaller schools, the replacement of individual staff members, or the dismissal of the superintendent and the Board. The recommendations, however, have approached solutions differently. First the recommendations address attitudinal and policy orientations necessary for long term solutions. These recommendations include a greater emphasis on partnership in the decision making processes, greater emphasis on proactive, future oriented leadership, greater emphasis on a policy and planning approach to the operation of the system and schools, and a two-way mode of communication.

The recommendations suggest that the Lac La Biche School Division and Alberta Education collaborate in testing a number of innovative projects and management procedures.

This "process" orientation to issue resolution, with an emphasis on a "partnership" mode of operation, would have much to commend it in any system review, but it is particularly relevant in respect to the problems faced by the Lac La Biche School Division and - by implication - Alberta Education:

1) The partnership mode of operation is a key component of the Management and Finance Plan. One of the goals of the Management and Finance Plan is ". . . enhanced partnership among school organizations and Alberta Education in the planning and evaluation of

educational results," and two of the means suggested for moving toward the goals are through" . . . developing and improving management capacity for the delivery of education in Alberta" and ". . . greater participation in joint provincial/local activities."

2) Many of the existing conditions which led to the issues confronting Lac La Biche were brought to the fore and made evident by the initiatives of Alberta Education and the Provincial Government. While the major responsibility for solutions to the problems in Lac La Biche is a local responsibility the readiness of Alberta Education to assist in the solution to these problems through a partnership orientation and mode of operation would help in overcoming the difficulties.

3) In many respects the issues faced by the Lac La Biche School Division are a magnified version of issues facing many school jurisdictions in Alberta. Therefore, a partnership mode of operation would provide Alberta Education with a very timely opportunity to try out and assess many of the initiatives, programs and orientations it is proposing for educational jurisdictions across the Province.

4) The involvement of the two major players - the Board of Trustees and Alberta Education in activating the "partnership" orientation of the Management and Finance Plan should go a long way toward convincing the other players - teachers, students and parents - that the issues are being taken seriously and, therefore, increase the likelihood that they will also become committed to the undertaking - a condition necessary for improvement.

5) Research, theory and practice in the area of change and renewal in human service organizations suggests that the chance for successful renewal - especially for organizations with the type of problems presently faced by the Lac La Biche School Division, is significantly increased if all players are involved in the process in a partnership and shared decision making mode.

By using procedures based on these orientations, or principles, the Board, and the administration should be able to reorient the system to provide for the flexibility of management and program development and delivery which current trends both within and without the jurisdiction demand.

The specific means of financing the procedures recommended have not been addressed in the study. It is assumed that there will be a thorough analysis of both the fiscal and human resources required. On the surface, it might be argued that additional funds are required to bring about the improvements suggested. However, the solutions to most of the underlying problems also requires a new approach and orientation by the Board and administration. Therefore, any renewal program must be initiated with the

full realization that it will probably, for the most part, have to be developed and implemented through efficiencies and reallocation of existing resources.

A project mode of operation is the basis of the recommendations and is detailed in the main report. This mode of operation promotes and puts into practise a commitment to partnership in education. Specific suggestions about the use of such temporary systems are provided.

The recommendations are:

- that the jurisdiction establish a governance and administrative renewal program task force to review and develop roles, policies, and procedures for the Division and for the schools. The task force should be made up of representatives of all identified stakeholders.

- that program renewal task forces of teachers, parents, and students be established at each school, and that the mandate be administrative and program planning and communications at the school level.

- that the Board of Trustees establish a program renewal task force for the system and that specific projects be identified, planned, and implemented.

- that specific recommendations regarding J. A. Williams High School, the size of the Board of Trustees, the improvement of facilities, grade organization, and transportation policy be undertaken immediately.

- that the Board of Trustees initiate contact with relevant associations to improve teacher and student morale and school and system climate.

- that this report be presented to relevant stakeholder groups in the jurisdiction.

The recommendations are presented in full in the last section of this Executive Summary.

CONCLUSIONS

It might be expected that a study of this nature should have as its focus a discussion of interculture conflict. Some feel that the media concentration on native - non-native 'racial' issues reflects the reality of the Lac La Biche School jurisdiction. The study team found that intercultural tensions

do exist but that they are not a major issue. The underlying conditions deserved more attention than specific incidents of conflicts.

The study team has discussed intercultural issues in the literature review, has mentioned the need for more intergroup/intercultural understanding, and has recommended procedures which should help promote mutual respect between the various cultural (and other) groups residing within the jurisdiction.

Lac La Biche School Division will have to make several changes in its operations, governance, administration and programs. However, the sharply focussed exposure that has been given to the Division over the past year must not be allowed to unduly magnify the difficulties within the Division. Pointing an accusing finger at any one of the stakeholders in the situation (government, trustees, administration, community, students, teachers, the media, or others) would prove fruitless and counterproductive. An atmosphere conducive to feelings of lethargy and hopelessness must not be allowed to prevail in Lac La Biche.

A positive orientation toward partnership and change by all stakeholders is necessary for renewal within the school division. The recommendations of this study are intended to provide this opportunity.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. IT IS RECOMMENDED

That the Board of Trustees of the Lac La Biche School Division #51 and the Alberta Education activate the intentions of the "partnership" concept contained in the Management and Finance Plan so as to initiate an Educational Renewal Program in the Lac La Biche School Division, and that such a partnership be based on the understanding:

1) that the Lac La Biche School Division assume major responsibility for the Renewal Program;

2) that the Board of Trustees adopt a partnership orientation with its staff, the parents, and the community in the development and implementation of improvement goals, policies, and programs;

3) that the Alberta Education provide reasonable program planning and development funds through the use of present funding programs in return for the participation of the Division in testing programs and procedures which are jointly agreed to by the Board and Alberta Education; and that Alberta Education also agree to provide one or more representatives to participate on "renewal task forces" and representatives and/or consultative services, where appropriate, for renewal projects; and

4) that the Lac La Biche School Division make funds available through economies and/or reallocations, for program planning, development and implementation.

2. IT IS RECOMMENDED

1) that all individuals and groups involved in the educational process in the Lac La Biche School Division give serious consideration to participating in a program of Educational Renewal in the Division, and that if they decide to participate, they commit themselves to a philosophy of improvement, a belief that the process must succeed, and a working relationship with all others based on mutual respect, trust, and open communications; and

2) that all individuals willing to participate so inform the appropriate organizations to which they belong and/or the Lac La Biche School Division, and that all groups and agencies willing to participate so inform the Lac La Biche School Division.

3. IT IS RECOMMENDED

1) that the Board of Trustees of the Lac La Biche School Division establish a Governance/Administration Renewal Program designed to review and develop goals, policies, and procedures for the governance of the Lac La Biche School Division, the administration of the Division, and the operation of the schools in the Division;

2) that the overall orientation established to guide the review and development task include:

   -- a leadership, proactive, future-directed orientation to goal establishment, system administration, and school operation;

- -- a partnership and shared decision making approach with the staff and the community, in governing and operating the system and the schools;

- -- a policy/planning approach to the operation of the system and the schools; and

- -- an open, two-way, listening mode of communication.

3) that a Task Force made up of representatives from all involved groups in the Division be established to design and oversee the Governance/Administration Renewal Program and that Alberta Education, the ASTA, the CASS, the CSA, and the Faculties of Education in Alberta be invited to participate in the Program either on the Task Force or as consultants. A time frame of from three to six months and a budget of approximately forty to fifty thousand dollars would probably be required.

4. IT IS RECOMMENDED

1) that the Board of Trustees of the Lac La Biche School Division request and assist each school establish a Program Renewal Task Force made up of teachers, parents, students (where appropriate), and the principal to consider the implications of this report for the school, to consider immediate actions which could be taken to improve the quality of education in the school, and to begin consideration of long range plans for educational renewal in the school;

2) that the school task forces be established for a minimum period of six months, or until some action is taken by the Board (as a result of the Report of the Governance and Administration Task Force) with respect to administration, program planning, and communication at the school level; and

3) that a planning budget be provided to each task force to assist it carry out its work: some release time for the coordinator of the particular task force (school or system), travel funds, and miscellaneous administrative costs. A minimum six month budget of from five to ten thousand dollars would probably be required for each school.

5. IT IS RECOMMENDED

1) that the Board of Trustees of the Lac La Biche School Division establish a Program Renewal Task Force, at the Divisional level, consisting of two representatives from each school task force (a staff member and a community member), two Board members, an administrator from central office, a Coordinator appointed by the Board, and a representative from Alberta Education to consider the implications of this report for the Division, to consider immediate actions which could be taken to improve the quality of education in the Division, and to begin consideration of long range plans for educational renewal in the Division;

2) that the Program Renewal Task Force be established for a minimum period of six months, or until some action is taken by the Board (as a result of the Report of the Governance and Administration Task Force) with respect to administration, program planning and communication at the Division level; and

3) that a planning budget be provided for the Task Force to assist it in carrying out its work - a salary or release time for the Coordinator, an Administrative Assistant, travel funds and miscellaneous administrative costs. A minimum six month budget of from forty to fifty thousand dollars would probably be required.

6. IT IS RECOMMENDED

1) that the Board and the administration of the Lac La Biche School Division give high priority to improving the facilities at J. A. Williams High School, including upgrading, maintenance, and finding satisfactory lunchroom and study space;

2) that supervision of facilities and activities be upgraded;

3) that permission for students to leave the school property during the school day be reviewed and, if possible, more carefully controlled;

4) that the school staff, the Student's Union, the Home and School Association, and other appropriate groups investigate ways and means of increasing the number and variety of intramurals (in addition to competitive sports) and other interest groups available for student participation during noon hour and "spare" periods;

5) that the use of community members and agencies in the sponsorship and supervision of intramurals, clubs, and interest groups be given serious consideration;

6) that the institution of a shorter noon hour and/or staggered noon hours be investigated;

7) that the perceived male domination of the Physical Education program, and the concern expressed by many that there is an over emphasis on competitive sports in the program be investigated and, if found to be true, changed; and

8) that a task force of teachers, students, and parents be established to consider ways and means of improving communications, counselling services and/or any other matter of concern to any or all of the participants.

7. IT IS RECOMMENDED

1) that the Board of Trustees petition the Minister of Education to increase the size of the Board from five to seven members; and, that in the redrawing of the electoral sub-divisions made necessary by the increase in the number of trustees, the geographic area approximating the boundaries of the Kikino East and West Settlements be made into an electoral subdivision of the Lac La Biche School Division;

2) that the Board of Trustees place a high priority on improving the school facilities in Lac La Biche, including the replacement of Central Elementary School and the upgrading of J. A. Williams to include a cafeteria, study rooms, counselling facilities, more classrooms, and recreation space;

3) that as soon as possible a restructuring of the grade placements within the various schools be made so that the grade nine students can be moved out of J. A. Williams: (this move would provide the space for appropriate modifications in J.A.W.H.S., but would also require additional modifications of facilities in order to accommodate all of the junior high school grades in one facility; and

4) that the transportation policy be reviewed, especially with regard to a maximum bus size, a maximum time for students to spend on a bus during any one trip, the clothing regulations, and the supervision of loading.

8. **IT IS RECOMMENDED**

that the Board of Trustees initiate contact with the principals' association, the Lac La Biche local of the Alberta Teachers' Association, the Home and School Association, and appropriate student unions to establish a partnership mechanism for examining and improving teacher and student morale, relieving frustrations in the Division, improving school climate, and establishing the commitment and enthusiasm necessary to undertake the recommendations contained in this report.

9. **IT IS RECOMMENDED**

that the report be given wide distribution among the staff and within the community, and that presentations of the report be made to the Board, the staff, and to a series of public forums.